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Stores Say Wild Salmon, but Tests Say Farm Bred

By MARIAN BURROS

A growing concern about the safety of farm-raised fish has given fresh wild salmon cachet. It has become the darling of chefs, who praise its texture and flavor as superior to the fatty, neutral-tasting farmed variety, and many shoppers are willing to pay far more for it than for farmed salmon.

Yet last month, when fresh wild salmon should have been scarce, 23 of 25 stores checked by The Times said they had it in stock.

The Times sent random samples of salmon bought on March 9 to Craft Technologies in Wilson, N.C., for testing and comparison of levels of natural and artificial pigments, a method that scientists at the Food and Drug Administration have used to identify wild and farmed salmon. The Craft scientists analyzed pigments known as carotenoids.

Tests on "wild salmon" from eight New York City stores showed that only a sample from Eli's Manhattan was genuine. Samples from six other stores proved to be farm raised. Only the sample bought at Eli's Manhattan on the Upper East Side tested wild.

Joseph Catalano, who is responsible for the fish Eli's and the Vinegar Factory sell, said he was not surprised by the test results. "The bottom line on all this is money," he said. Tests performed for The New York Times in March on salmon sold as wild by eight New York City stores, going for as much as \$29 a pound, showed that the fish at six of the eight were farm raised. Farmed salmon, available year round, sells for \$5 to \$12 a pound in the city.

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The findings mirror suspicions of many in the seafood business that wild salmon could not be so available from November to March, the off-season. Wild and farmed salmon fillets and steaks look similar because farmed fish are fed artificial coloring that makes them pink, but that coloring can be measured in laboratory testing.

